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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4798  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001370

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/20/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [AG](#) [MO](#) [TU](#) [WS](#) [FR](#)  
SUBJECT: NEA/MAG DIRECTOR JORDAN REVIEWS MAGHREB ISSUES  
WITH FRENCH MFA

REF: A. PARIS 282

[1](#)B. 05 PARIS 7777

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: NEA/MAG Director William Jordan's February 27 meetings with MFA counterparts addressed the Western Sahara conflict, Moroccan-Algerian relations, human rights issues in Tunisia, and Libya. On Western Sahara, MFA officials agreed with Jordan on the need for Morocco to be more forward-leaning on autonomy, but suggested Algeria was more to blame than Rabat for increased inflexibility. MFA officials advocated preserving MINURSO, but offered differing responses on prospects for joint action by France, Spain, and the U.S., with FM Douste-Blazy's cabinet advisor on the Maghreb more forward-leaning on the latter issue. MFA officials, while expressing uncertainty and concern on post-Bouteflika Algeria, expressed greater worry about Morocco's future stability over the next five to ten years, particularly given growing Islamist influence. On Tunisia, MFA officials concurred with U.S. human rights concerns and emphasized discreet GoF efforts to address the issue, asserting that public pressure on the GOT tends to be counterproductive. On Libya, MFA officials concurred on the need for speedy release of the Bulgarian/Palestinian medical personnel, and confirmed that five HIV-infected Libyan children (out of an expected total of 150) had arrived in France for treatment. End summary.

WESTERN SAHARA, MOROCCO AND ALGERIA  
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[1](#)2. (C) MFA DAS-equivalent Christian Testot shared Jordan's distress at the rigidity of Morocco, Algeria, and POLISARIO in their positions on the Western Sahara dispute, and agreed that the food shortages in Sahrawi camps required international attention. Deploying the traditional argument that Western Sahara is a "survival issue" for Morocco but not Algeria, Testot described the Algerian government as having the upper hand over Morocco, due to booming oil prices, Algeria's increased leadership role in the Arab world, improved relations with the West, and Morocco's concurrent economic difficulties and weak leadership. This elevated GOA confidence, in Testot's view, prompted a more rigid GOA stance on Western Sahara, which in turn reinforced the POLISARIO's refusal to accept anything less than self-determination (to include the possibility of independence).

[1](#)3. (C) When asked prospects for joint efforts by the U.S., France, and Spain, Testot voiced reluctance, citing Algerian unreceptivity to hearing any messages on Western Sahara from France, given its perception that France was totally biased in Morocco's favor. He also observed that although the French and Spanish positions were not far apart, Western

Sahara remained an internal issue for Spain, which was not the case for France. In the GoF view, the key to progress on the Western Sahara remained dialogue between Algiers and Rabat, beginning with bilateral issues other than the Western Sahara, such as opening the border. Testot stressed that the U.S. could play an important role in encouraging Algiers to be more open to dialogue with Rabat, commending U.S. success in securing GOA cooperation with the POLISARIO's 2005 release of Moroccan POWs. For its part, the GoF had encouraged the Moroccan government to enlarge its concept of autonomy and not to present an offer in April which would be rejected out of hand by the POLISARIO. Further on UNSC consideration of MINURSO renewal in April, Testot stressed the need to preserve MINURSO and avoid "electro-shock" measures which could endanger the fragile cease-fire between the parties.

¶4. (C) In a separate discussion, MFA Cabinet Advisor for the Maghreb/Arabian Gulf Francois Touazi stressed the threat posed by the Western Sahara conflict to the stability of the Maghreb region. Like Testot, Touazi stressed the intractability of the Algerian position on Western Sahara, noting he had attended recent GoF discussions with the GOA and was taken aback by Algerian vehemence in refusing to discuss the issue with Rabat. Touazi speculated that the expected visit to Algiers by UNSYG Personal Envoy for Western Sahara Peter Van Walsum would be very difficult, and expressed his personal view that Van Walsum had little chance of success unless France, Spain, and the U.S. considered joint initiatives to support his efforts.

¶5. (C) Touazi echoed Testot's view that the solution to the Western Sahara remained in direct dialogue between Rabat and Algiers. He differed from Testot, however, in concluding that it may be easier to solicit constructive gestures from Rabat than Algiers, given the high confidence and increased

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intractability of the GOA. Touazi described Morocco as in an increasingly weak position vis-a-vis an ascendant Algiers, and fearful of both U.S. and French efforts to "court" Algeria. Morocco's 2007 elections and rising Islamist influence also weakened the GOM's position, making it impossible for the GOM to go too far on concessions on the Western Sahara. Touazi nonetheless suggested informal U.S.-French-Spanish brainstorming to consider ways to encourage Rabat to pursue "creative" formulas on autonomy which fall within its red-lines. Touazi also called for further reflection on what incentives could be offered to push Algiers towards accepting dialogue with Rabat. Jordan agreed to consider possibilities for further informal coordination between the U.S., Spain, and France at the working-level, without making further commitments.

¶6. (C) Comparing the internal situations in Algeria and Morocco, Touazi concluded that he was more worried about prospects for instability in Morocco in the next five to ten years, particularly due to the lack of capacity of the government and rising Islamic extremism. While the GoF remained concerned about Bouteflika's health, Touazi observed that the Algerian president seemed to have retaken the reins of power after his hospitalization and was continuing to consolidate his power base within the GOA. Touazi declined to speculate on who might succeed Bouteflika, noting the total "opacity" of the Algerian system. He speculated that possible instability after Bouteflika's demise would more likely result from tensions within different spheres of power in the government, rather than the "Islamist contagion," which had been contained by the GOA. Touazi also expressed concern about the GOA's continued failure to address socio-economic inequalities in the wake of booming oil prices and a population prone to violence.

TUNISIA HUMAN RIGHTS

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17. (C) Both Testot and Touazi agreed with NEA/MAG Director Jordan that Tunisia's continued political repression was in direct contradiction with the country's socio-economic advances and threatened the longterm stability of the country, particularly in the post-Ben Ali phase. Testot and Touazi described the GoF as becoming more outspoken on human rights in Tunisia, noting that FM Douste-Blazy, during an October 2005 visit to Tunis, declared human rights to be an important part of bilateral dialogue -- the first time a French minister had made such a declaration. (As reported ref b Douste-Blazy also met with Tunisian League of Human Rights members during that visit, another first for a French FM.) The GoF had also increased its private entreaties to the GOT, expressing concern about the deteriorating human rights situation. While conceding that GoF efforts have brought no tangible results, Testot counseled against public pressure on the GoT. Direct confrontation, he argued, would be counterproductive, causing Tunisia to turn inward and possibly increasive repressive measures.

LIBYA

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18. (C) Testot and Touazi concurred with Jordan on the need for a speedy release of the Bulgarian nurses and Palestinian doctor and stressed that FM Douste-Blazy, who is a physician and former minister of health, has a strong personal interest in the issue. Touazi described his efforts, on the FM's behalf, to initiate contacts with the families of the some 400 children in Benghazi infected with HIV/AIDS. (Ref a reports on Douste-Blazy's January 2006 trip to Libya, which focused on the imprisoned medics issue.) Touazi confirmed the GoF offer to treat some 150 of the children in France, the first five of whom arrived in Paris February 27. While Testot sought additional information on U.S.-UK efforts to launch an international foundation to treat the Libyan children, he reiterated that the GoF did not intend to make a financial contribution to the foundation.

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